

## **Special interests order 'About Face' for Corps on Missouri**

News Release

American Rivers

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LINCOLN, Neb., Aug. 2 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Conservation groups reacted angrily to today's announcement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that it will release an Environmental Impact Statement on Missouri Dam operations by the end of August -- without specifying how it intends to prevent three river species from going extinct. As recently as July 22, the Corps publicly stated its intention to include a preferred alternative in the draft environmental impact statement that would meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. By giving in to pressure to back away from these commitments, the Corps' announcement raises troubling questions about the amount of influence exercised by the barge industry and its allies in Congress and the Bush Administration.

"The barge industry, the agricultural lobby, and their political allies have ordered 'about face,' and the Army Corps has snapped to and saluted," said Chad Smith, director of American Rivers' Missouri River Field Office. "After spending twelve years and millions of dollars studying the river, the Corps is afraid to break the good news to the people along the Missouri that it will fix river flows to save fish and wildlife and boost the economies in riverside communities."

Later this month, the Corps will release a draft impact statement for revisions to the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual, or Master Manual, the guidebook used by the federal river agency to manage the Missouri's six big dams in Montana, the Dakotas, and Nebraska. The process has been underway since 1989. In the revision, the Corps must address a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion on Missouri River dam operations that called for an increase in springtime dam release and lower releases in the summer to prevent the extinction of the three species and the further decline of many other native Missouri River species.

All seven state wildlife agencies and the Corps itself have concurred with the federal biologists' conclusion that increased spring flows are needed to provide a reproductive cue for sturgeon, and to build and scour the sandbars used by nesting terns and plovers. Lower summer flows would ensure that sandbars remain dry during the nesting season, and provide shallow water for young fish.

"By dragging its feet on addressing the needs of the Missouri's endangered and threatens species, the Corps could eventually open itself to a lawsuit under the Endangered Species Act," Smith said.

Fearing the loss of taxpayer handouts and a few weeks of traffic during its off season, the barge industry has spread misinformation that play on urban residents fear of floods, and farmers' concerns about draining fields and moving crops. According to the Corps' own

analysis, making modest flow changes would still provide 99 percent of the system's current flood control benefit, improve drainage for most floodplain farmers at least two out of every three years, and benefit navigation on the lower Mississippi River in the fall and during droughts.

"The Corps, at the urging of the Bush Administration, has decided to decide nothing -- that is government at its worst," said Smith.

For more information about American Rivers efforts to restore the Missouri River, visit <http://www.americanrivers.org/missouririver/default.htm>.